

The University of Chicago

THE LANGUAGE OF FIRST ESDRAS

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF NEW TESTAMENT AND
EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

1933

By

LOUIS BROWN MATTHEWS

Private Edition, Distributed by
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CHAPTER V

SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE BOOK OF FIRST ESDRAS

The Apocryphal Ezra occupies a rather unique place in the history of the Old Testament. It is a story of the rebuilding of the temple, with Ezra as its chief character. Its materials, with the exception of one original story, are found in the canonical books, though there has been one transposition and much alteration. It is probably a composite work, since events happening during the reign of three Persian kings, Cyrus, Artaxerxes, and Darius, are thrown together without much question of historical fitness. Chronology and consistency in naming the right king do not appear to be of primary importance to the compiler. Some scholars have attempted to reconcile the book with history, but they have had little success. A much more profitable way of studying it is that of searching for its purpose and then recognizing that the various events are brought together for furthering that purpose, even when continuity and consistency must be sacrificed.

Its first chapter corresponds to the last two chapters of II Chronicles, and a part of the last chapter (9:37-55) to a part of the eighth chapter of Nehemiah. The intervening section contains the material of the entire book of Ezra. Many scholars believe that the book as we have it is incomplete. Others feel that only the conclusion is incomplete, since that part seems to break off rather abruptly. Josephus, who follows our book, continues the story found in the eighth chapter of Nehemiah through the description of the Feast of Tabernacles, using the Esdras expression ἐκανόρθωσις. Professor Thackeray thinks this to be sufficient evidence that our book ended with a description of the feast, but he is insistent that it never began earlier than our version indicates. The Latin versions add a clause to complete the Greek

sentence which appears to be broken.

There seems to be nothing at all inconsistent in the way the book begins, καὶ ἤγαγεν Ἰωσείας τὸ πάσχα ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ τῷ κυρίῳ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔθυσαν τὸ πάσχα τῇ τεσσαρεσκαίδεκάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ μηνὸς τοῦ πρώτου. The story is clearly to open with Josiah's Passover. The Book of Judges can open with the death of Joshua, and I Kings with the old age of David. Of course, I Chronicles is more ambitious and gives some nine chapters of genealogy before beginning the story thus: "Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in Mount Gilboa" (10:1). But we who must read the histories are glad that very few historians have followed his example. The only reason for suggesting that I Esdras began at an earlier point is to support the theory of its being a part of the longer history. We have too many examples of books written about the events centering around one man, or the happenings in the nation for a limited time, to make such a theory necessary. And so we cannot believe that our I Esdras ever began at an earlier point than the one at which our version begins.

It is quite possible that a clause at the end, or even a short section that would give the description of the Feast of Tabernacles, may have been lost. The fact that Josephus gives an account of this feast, and that the parallel in Nehemiah enters directly into it, would seem to suggest that point of view. And yet the division is easily seen in Nehemiah. The people have come together to hear the Law read and explained, and then they are told: "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength." After the people had done as they were bidden, the story makes way for the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles with the following words:

And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the Law. And they found written in the Law which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children should dwell in booths in the feast

of the seventh month (Neh. 8:13-14).

Professor Batten makes the following comment on this ending:

In Cod. L this v. is completed, and I am convinced that we have here one of the many attempts to bring Esd. into conformity with MT. In other words, Esd. really ends the Ezra story with Ne. 8:13, and in my opinion that text never contained any more about Ezra.

This conclusion is supported by the testimony of Jos. It is contended by Howorth and Torrey that Jos. uses Ne. 8:13 ff. This does not seem to me to be the case. He does, indeed, refer to the Feast of Booths, but only as a note of time; for he makes it the occasion of the assembly in the 7th month at which the law was read as described in Ne. 8:1-12 = Esd. 9:37-55 (Ant. XI, 5, 5). There is not a reference to anything related in Ne. 9, 10. Jos. knew nothing of any event in the story of Ezer. after the reading of the law.¹

Though Professor Batten is insistent that the Ezra story ends here, he feels that "we may with a certain amount of probability conclude that Esdras originally contained the unadulterated Neh." But why is it necessary to hold that the memoirs of Nehemiah were contained in this book? Any historian would make use of various sources, and Josephus must have had more than our book for this Persian period. We dare suggest that our book ends with the people's celebration after the Law had been read and explained: καὶ ᾤχοντο πάντες φαγεῖν καὶ πιεῖν καὶ εὐφραίνεσθαι, καὶ δοῦναι ἀποστολὰς τοῖς μὴ ἔχουσιν, καὶ εὐφρανθῆναι μεγάλως· ὅτι καὶ ἐνεφυσιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς ῥήμασιν οἷς ἐδιδάχθησαν. καὶ ἐπισυνήχθησαν. And those who are not satisfied with this ending we would advise to take it as representing attempts to bring it into conformity with the MT. For, according to Professor Batten,² there was a tendency to correct the Greek version on the basis of the Hebrew in the case of every book of the Old Testament.

The purpose of the book seems to me to be that of showing to Greek-speaking Jews how their God had moved foreign monarchs to favour them. They were a peculiar people, and they should continue to trust in Divine Providence. The art of the compiler is clearly seen in his ability to weave unrelated materials together

¹L. W. Batten, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, in The International Critical Commentary (New York, 1913), p. 10.

²Ibid., p. 11.

toward the furthering of this object. He is not always consistent in his history, but we should not demand too much of him.

Doubtless, too, one object of the compiler was to give currency to this story of the three pages, since he makes it a kind of nucleus around which to group the other material. Scholars do not agree about the origin of this story, but most of them think that originally it had no connection with this part of Jewish history. It would appear that an earlier Persian story was adopted by the Jews of Alexandria and associated with the name of Zerubbabel. In this case the speakers of the original were Persian guardsmen. The praise of truth may be a Jewish addition, and yet Persian respect for truth would make that country a fitting place for such a eulogy.

The adjustment of the story is seen in what some scholars think is a gloss, οὗτός ἐστιν Ζεροβαβέλ (4:13). But those who believe that the story was brought in by the compiler would also take this clause as his work. However, even if the praise of truth is taken as being a part of the original story, it must have ended with 4:42. The remainder down to 5:6 may have been composed by the compiler in order to tie this story up with the mission to Jerusalem for the sake of rebuilding the temple. This part would naturally not have been in the original story, but at least a part of it may have come from the source materials dealing with the return of the Jews. Without this connecting link there would be no motive or benefit in bringing the story into the narrative.

A still further purpose of the book seems to be that of securing the favour of the Ptolemaic rulers. The magnificence of Josiah's Passover receives special emphasis. This is followed by the Babylonian captivity for the nation's sin. The splendour and power of the Persian rulers are such as to attract particular attention. The friendliness of such rulers toward the Jews and their interest in rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem would tend also to impress other rulers with the justice of the Jewish cause. And the fact that in 2:25-31 the Lord is represented as sending the king of Egypt out to war against Euphrates and that Josiah's punishment

for opposing him is confessed would also seem to be a bid for Egyptian recognition.

The book was probably compiled in Alexandria about 150 B. C. The reference in 4:23 to "sailing upon the sea and upon the rivers" for the purpose of "robbing and stealing" is taken as evidence of Egyptian origin. Some think that the Apame referred to in 4:29 was concubine or queen to a ruler of Egypt. Also certain words and expressions point to Alexandrian origin, as ἔσχοσαν and ἐφάγοσαν (probably Alexandrian aorists) and κοίλη Συρία καὶ Φοινίκη rather than the πέραν τοῦ ποταμοῦ used by II Esdras.

The stories here are more or less like those of Aristeas, Daniel, and Esther. And they should probably be assigned to approximately the same date. Many scholars have noticed a close similarity in language between I Esdras and the LXX of Daniel, and they seem to feel that the obligation is on the part of the Daniel translator. Some would go further and say that the two come from the same hand. It has also been noticed that the author of the oldest Sibylline books refers to the story employed in this book. But he may have had an older form of the story before him, one similar to that from which Esdras also borrowed. The fact that there are so many similar stories in this period would suggest common ideas and source materials rather than make one author dependent upon another.

When it comes to the matter of language, all recognize that as a whole this book is written in good idiomatic Greek. However, the Semitists claim to find numerous examples of "Hebraisms." The evidence gained from the papyri by Deissmann, Moulton, Thackeray, and Milligan denies that such is true. There seems to be no reason to doubt that the Jews wrote more or less the same type of Greek as the Arabs, Egyptians, and many others whose works have been examined. Then constructions found in the papyri and inscriptions must be taken as representative of the normal Greek of this period, unless one should insist that the language itself has been influenced by the Semitic expressions. Professor Thackeray says of this:

A question closely connected with that of the dialectical differences in the Koiné is the question how far it was

influenced by the native languages of the countries which used it. The question is important, as bearing on the 'Hebraisms' of the LXX. The foreign influence seems to have been extremely small. In the Ptolemaic papyri Mayser finds no more than 28 words which are 'probably Egyptian,' 14 only of these are words which are unknown to the older literature. Only a single instance of Coptic syntactical influence has been discovered in the whole papyrus collection. The contribution of the indigenous languages of Asia to the Koiné vocabulary appears to be equally negligible. Latin alone brought a relatively large number of words into the common stock: but its influence on the grammar was quite slight. The general impression produced is that the resistance which Greek offered to the intrusion of foreign elements was much the same in the Hellenistic period as in the age of Pericles. The Greek language was at all times the giver rather than the receiver, and when it borrowed it usually clothed its loans in a dress of its own making.¹

It seems that scholars need to read again and again the prologue to Luke's gospel: "Many writers have undertaken to compose accounts For that reason and because I have investigated it all carefully I have determined to write" If we could only understand what Luke is telling us, we would not be nearly so prone to insist that there was one standard version for each event and that everyone who happened to tell something that was found in this version was surely translating from it. The stories of Israel's heroes must have been told again and again, and they would naturally be told differently according to the personality and purpose of the author. These stories were the possession of every loyal Jew, some handed down in more than one oral or written version. And, with the exception of the books of the law, each author who retold them took certain liberties for himself. We have clear evidence of these facts in the four gospels that have come down to us.

The evidence seems to be against the theory that our book once formed a part of the entire Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah history. I Esdras is too different in vocabulary, syntax, and points of emphasis. It is a book relating the events in the time of Ezra, going backward a little to bring in those which lead up to the ones to be told here.

¹Henry St. John Thackeray, A Grammar Of The Old Testament In Greek (Cambridge, 1909), I, 20.

Now I Esdras has some material common to that found in II Chronicles, some to that in II Esdras, and other material that we are sure was drawn from sources outside any of our canonical books. But it is a master hand that puts this material together, and the result is entirely different from that obtained in any of the books containing this material. It is the story that this particular author, or authors, would tell, worked over later by many harmonistic scribes.

In the matter of vocabulary there is much to indicate that I Esdras is not from the same hand as Chronicles, but is rather a separate and distinct work. In the very first verse we find the verb ἄγειν used with πάσχα. These words are not so used together in any other book of either the Old or New Testaments. Such a usage for ἄγειν is given by Liddell and Scott's Lexicon: "To keep in memory, καὶ μὲν κλέος ἦγον Ἀχαιοὶ Od. 5. 311. .. like agere, to hold, celebrate, ἐορτήν, τὰ Ὀλύμπια, etc. Hdt. I. 147, 183: though this more freq. in Att. (for Hdt. mostly uses ἀνάγειν)." πάσχα does not appear at all in Chronicles, while φάσεχ, the word used in Chronicles, is only found once outside of that book (Jer. 38 [31]:8).

I Esdras has several peculiar words referring to the temple and the priests, as ἐπιστάτης, ἱερόδουλος, ἱεροστάτης, and ἱεροψάλτης; and then uses θεραπεύειν with the meaning of "ministering to people." λατρεύειν is coordinated with it but is used only for "service to God." This distinction is maintained in the New Testament. Chronicles never uses θεραπεύειν. Nor does it distinguish the two ideas, but uses λατρεύειν for both.

In the section parallel to Chronicles there are the following rather conspicuous words that do not appear in either book of Chronicles: πάσχα, ἱερόδουλος, θεραπεύειν, μεριδαρχία, δωρεῖσθαι, εὐπρεπῶς, μεγαλειότης, τάξεις, βασιλικός, καθήκειν, χάλκειος, εὐδοκία, ἁωρία, ἱεροψάλτης, θυρωρός, ἄσεβεῖν, συμβαίνειν, μεταλάσσειν, προκαθῆσθαι, ἱστορεῖν, ἀναδεικνύειν, ζημιοῦν, δεσσέβεια, δυσσέβημα, ἀχρειοῦν. In the other canonical parts of I Esdras there are some eighty words that do not appear in Chronicles. It

is true that this latter material is not contained in Chronicles, and yet a translator is constantly repeating himself in matters of vocabulary and syntax. This is a strong indication that the two works are not by the same hand.

I Esdras is the only book of the Septuagint that contains the following words: ἀναγνώστης, ἀναμφισβητήτως, ἀντιπαράτασσειν, ἀποσημαίνειν, βιβλιοφυλαχίον, δημαγωγεῖν, δημαγωγία, ἐγχάσκειν, ἐκπαίξειν, ἐμφυσιοῦν, ἐπακουτός, ἐπιδόξως, ἱεροδουλος, ἱεροστάτης, ἱεροψάλτης, ἱστορεῖν, κάρρον, ληστεύειν, λωποδυτεῖν, μεριδαρχία, μεταγενέστερος, ὀνοματογραφία, πραγματικός, προκαθηγεῖσθαι, προπομπή, συμβραβεύειν, συνεξορμᾶσθαι, σύννους, ὑπομνηματίζειν, χάσκειν (v. ἐγχάσκειν). Of these thirty words ἱστορεῖν is the only one appearing in the New Testament, and it appears once (Gal.1:18).

Something of the same is true with regard to its relation to II Esdras. In the sections parallel to it there are some 120 words that do not appear in II Esdras. Especially notable is the fact that I Esdras uses ὁ ἑπαρχος Συρίας καὶ Φοινίκης where II Esdras always has ὁ ἑπαρχος πέραν τοῦ ποταμοῦ. Professor Torrey suggests that this use by I Esdras indicates an Alexandrian origin.

It is noticed that there is a special kinship in vocabulary to Esther, LXX Daniel, and to the Apocrypha (especially Macabees and Wisdom). Some words not found in Chronicles are used in the Pentateuch and Kings. Some of these facts lead one to question whether I Esdras is not closer to Kings and the Pentateuch than to Chronicles. I Esdras certainly differs greatly from both Chronicles and II Esdras.

The differences in syntax are no less striking. Chronicles uses almost mechanically the aorist indicative to the exclusion of the aorist participle. I Esdras constantly avoids this construction. The second verse in the two books gives good examples of this phenomenon. Chronicles has καὶ ἔστησεν τοὺς ἱερεῖς, while I Esdras can turn to the aorist participle στήσας τοὺς ἱερεῖς I Esdras can also substitute a noun for the verb, ἐν τῇ θέσει τῆς ἀγίας κιβωτοῦ τοῦ κυρίου, while Chronicles continues with the aorist indicative, καὶ ἔθηκαν τὴν κιβωτὸν τὴν ἀγίαν εἰς τὸν οἶκον

Out of a total of 195 verb forms Chronicles has 124 aorists, 63.5%, and only 8 aorist participles, 1.5%. Out of a total of 164 verb forms, I Esdras has 68 aorist indicatives, 46.3%, but it also has 22 aorist participles, 13.4%.

In II Esdras, out of a total of 104 verb forms, there are 44 aorist indicatives, 42.3%, and there is only one aorist participle, less than 1%. In the I Esdras parallel, out of a total of 119 verb forms, there are 32 aorist indicatives, 26.8%, and 9 aorist participles, 7.5%. There are 16 present participles in this I Esdras passage to 7 in II Esdras, or a total of 21% for participles to 7.6% in II Esdras. In the story of the guardsmen there are 82 aorist indicatives out of a total of 333, 24.6%, and 17 aorist participles, 5.1%.

The extreme frequency of $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ is quite noticeable, when we come to the matter of prepositions. Chronicles has 47 cases of $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ out of 147 uses of the preposition, 31.9%; and I Esdras 34 out of 110, 30.9%. II Esdras is slightly lower than I Esdras, 41.1% to 43.4%. But in the face of this fact it is interesting to note that in the original section (3:1-5:6) the ratio is 18.2% for $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ and 16.1% for $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$.

Another striking feature of the syntax is the frequency of $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$ used as the third person pronoun. In Chronicles its ratio to the appearances of the pronoun is 73.6%, in II Esdras 44.8%, and in I Esdras 62.3% and 33.3%. I Esdras is seen to have a much lower ratio than its parallels. The nature of the story of the guardsmen calls for a frequent use of the third person, and there is no parallel with which to compare it. The ratio here is 55%.

The normal word order for Chronicles and II Esdras is verb, subject, object; verb, object; and verb, subject. I Esdras has this order as its most frequent one, and yet it is not nearly so regular as the other two. The story of the guardsmen is especially irregular, showing all types of order. It is clearly a different type of Greek.

In the face of good examples from classical authors and the papyri to the contrary, certain Semitic scholars still insist that

I Esdras abounds in Semitisms. The sections containing the canonical materials are known to have a Semitic language back of them, whether our book is translation or composition. And, since the story of the guardsmen has been a question of debate, we have examined some of the alleged Semitisms in this part of the book.

Professor Torrey bases his theory of an Aramaic original for this story on the 8 appearances of τότε in 93 verses, and this is done when some of the MSS differ as to its frequency, showing that it was either stealing in or being pushed out. The required meaning of "then" or "thereupon" is given in our lexicons, and so it becomes only a matter of determining whether Greek usage will allow it to continue a narrative. Until there is more proof to the contrary, we would suggest that this story may be taken as an example of Greek usage.

The use of εἰς as an indefinite article and that of the relative ὅς for the interrogative, both of which are cited as Semitisms, have been found in the papyri and inscriptions. Professors Deissmann and Moulton show conclusively that this usage is Greek.¹

That the use of ὑπέρ in ὑπέρ δὲ πάντα νικᾷ ἡ ἀλήθεια (3:12) is good Greek is clearly to be seen in the following examples from Liddell and Scott:

ὑπὲρ τὸ βέλτιστον, beyond what is best, Aesch. Ag. 378; ὑπὲρ δύναμιν, beyond its power, Thuc. 6, 16; μεγέθει ὑπὲρ τοὺς ἄλλους, Plat. Rep. 488A; ὑπὲρ τὸ ἥμισυ, more than half, Ib. 3. 8, 47; ὑπὲρ τεσσαράκοντα ἄνδρας, Hdt. 5. 64.2

A good example of this usage is also found in II Corinthians 11:23.

An extended use of ἀπό must be allowed, and its use in ἀλλὰ τὰ δίκαια ποιεῖ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἀδίκων καὶ πονηρῶν (4:39) taken from the Semitic class in the face of the papyrus example καὶ σὺ βλέπεις αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων (BGU 1079).³

¹Adolf Deissman, Light From The Ancient East, translated by Lionel R. M. Strachan (Bungay, Suffolk, 1927), pp. 185, 126-131. James Hope Moulton, A Grammar of New Testament Greek (Edinburgh, 1908), pp. 96, 93.

²Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon⁷ (New York, 1882).

³Deissmann, Op. cit., p. 120.

That the use of πρὸς in καὶ πρὸς τούτοις ὁ βασιλεὺς χάσ-
κων τὸ στόμα ἐθεώρει αὐτήν (4:31) is Greek is shown by the following
from Liddell and Scott: "πρὸς τῇ σκυτοτομίᾳ, in addition to his
trade as leather-cutter, Plat. Rep. 397E; πρὸς τῷ νέῳ, besides his
youth, Id. Symp. 195C; and πρὸς τοῖς ἄλλοις, besides all the rest,
Thuc. 2. 61."

For the use of πολὺς in 4:14 the following examples from
Liddell and Scott's Lexicon will suffice:

πολὺς ὕπνος, deep sleep, Od. 15. 394; πολὺς ὑμέναιος,
a loud song, Il. 18. 498; πολλὴ ἀνάγκη, strong necessity, Valck.
Phoen. 1668(1674); μέγας καὶ πολλὸς ἐγένετο, Hdt. 7. 14; πολλὸς
ὑπὸ παντὸς ἀνδρὸς αἰνεσόμενος, Hdt. I. 98; ὡς πολὺς ἔπνει καὶ
λαμπρὸς, (the wind) was blowing strong and fresh, Id. 787. 22;
ὅταν πολὺς ὁ θεὸς ἔλθῃ, Eur. Bacch. 300.

After an examination of these so-called Semitisms we must
conclude that the usage found here is not different from examples
found in Greek authors, many of them belonging to the classical
period. And they must be allowed here as Greek.

Hebrew and Aramaic certainly lie back of our I Esdras ver-
sion, and there is rather striking evidence that either our author
or the author of his sources understood Hebrew. Yet there seems
to be nothing in the language of the book to deny that it was com-
piled in Greek at Alexandria about the middle of the second century
B. C. The compiler drew his materials from whatever source he could
find them, Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic. The work as a whole shows
some definite marks of compilation. However, its Greek is quite
idiomatic, and it is probably more or less that which would have
been used by a writer of equal culture from any other racial group.
If some continue to find Semitisms, let them remember that one does
not always change the material he is using, and that our book has
suffered much from attempts at harmonization. Too, in its compo-
sition there may have been some imitation of the Septuagint. They
should also remember that if a Jew's translation is always so full
of "Hebraisms", he would put in some when using purely Greek material.

Our study shows clearly that we have three types of Greek
in these books. Chronicles and II Esdras are translation Greek.
The canonical parts of I Esdras are much more idiomatic. In the
story of the guardsmen all the evidence points to a Greek original.

